

## Democrats vow vote on gun bills; Biden says 'we have to act'

By MARY CLARE JALONICK

Associated Press

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — Democrats said Tuesday that they are pushing toward a vote on expanded gun control measures as the nation reels from its second mass shooting in a week. President Joe Biden said "we have to act," but prospects for any major changes were dim, for now, in the closely divided Congress.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer vowed Tuesday morning to bring to the Senate floor legislation passed by the House that would require background checks for most gun sales and transfers. He said the Senate "must confront a devastating truth" after a lack of congressional action on the issue for almost three decades.

"This Senate will be different," Schumer, D-N.Y., said a day after a shooting at a crowded Boulder, Colorado, supermarket, killed 10 people, including a police officer. "The Senate is going to debate and address the epidemic of gun violence in this country."

While a Senate vote on new gun control would be the first in several years, Democrats do not have the votes to pass any significant reform.



A man leaves a bouquet on a police cruiser parked outside the Boulder Police Department after an officer was one of the victims of a mass shooting at a King Soopers grocery store Tuesday, March 23, 2021, in Boulder, Colo.

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## Democrats vow vote on gun bills; Biden says 'we have to act'

Continued from Front

They are not even united themselves, as Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., told reporters Tuesday that he opposes the House legislation on background checks. The Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing Tuesday on proposals for gun control. It is unclear whether any of the bills up for consideration — most of them involving more restrictive background checks — would have made a difference in the Colorado case. A 21-year-old man charged with killing eight people in the Atlanta area last week had purchased a 9 mm handgun hours before the murders, prompting advocates to push for longer waiting periods for purchases.

In brief remarks responding to the shooting, Biden urged Congress to move quickly to close the loopholes in the background check system and to ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines — an effort that would be even more difficult to achieve politically. According to a police affidavit, the Colorado shooter had purchased an assault rifle six days earlier.

"It should not be a partisan issue," Biden said. "This is an American issue. It will save lives, American lives."

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., who has aggressively pushed for expanded gun control since the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School that killed 20 children and six educators, expressed optimism about the chances for new laws with Biden in the White House and Democrats controlling the House and the Senate. He called it "the dawn of a new era." Reality is likely more compli-



**Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of N.Y., speaks as Karen Gibson, the new Sergeant at Arms of the United States Senate, listens outside Schumer's office, Monday, March 22, 2021, at the Capitol in Washington.**

cated. Senate Democrats do not currently have deep enough support among Republicans to pass new gun control legislation in the 50-50 Senate, as they would need 60 votes to do so. While expanding background checks is generally popular with the American public, even with some conservatives, Congress has been unable to find a successful compromise on guns in decades, making it one of the most intractable issues in American politics. The gun debate also highlights a larger difficulty for Senate Democrats as they try to move forward on gun legislation and other policy priorities of the Biden White House. With the filibuster in place, forcing a 60-vote threshold for most legislation, House-passed bills on issues like gun control and voting rights are effectively nonstarters unless Democrats secure significant GOP support.

Some Republicans hinted that they would be open to

negotiations, though it was unclear if there were any real bipartisan discussions. Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell said he was opposed to the House legislation, but "I'm certainly open to the discussion." Manchin and Republican Sen. Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania, who have worked together for years to find compromise on background checks, both said they were opposed to the House legislation, which would close loopholes to ensure background checks are extended to private and online sales that often go undetected, including at gun shows, with some limited exemptions for family and other scenarios. A similar version Manchin and Toomey proposed just after the Sandy Hook shootings included a broader set of exemptions than the House bill.

The House also passed a second bill to extend a certain review period for background checks from

three to 10 days. Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., introduced the legislation after a shooter killed nine people at a Charleston, South Carolina, church in 2015.

Toomey said he would like to find legislation that could pass, but "that probably would require something that's a little bit different. So, we'll see if we can figure out how to thread that needle."

Manchin did not say whether he would restart negotiations, only that "we're going to try to do the responsible, reasonable thing." Schumer and Connecticut Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy, a leading advocate for gun control, said they would meet this week to discuss a path forward. Schumer has not said when he will bring the House legislation up for a vote.

Democrats say they feel the environment around gun legislation has evolved, especially since that last major push in 2013. They point to troubles at the Na-

tional Rifle Association, the long-powerful advocacy group that poured tens of millions of dollars into electing Donald Trump in 2016. The organization has been weakened by infighting as well as legal tangles over its finances.

"This is the moment to make our stand. NOW," tweeted Murphy as details of the Colorado shooting emerged Monday evening. "Today, our movement is stronger than the gun lobby. They are weak. We are potent. Finally, a President and a Congress that supports gun reform."

Democrats are hoping there is a gradual political shift among voters as well. A Pew Research Center poll in September 2019 showed a wide majority of Americans, 88%, supported making private gun sales and sales at gun shows subject to background checks, which is what the House-passed bill would do. Ninety-three percent of Democrats and 82% of Republicans were in favor of the policy.

Many in the GOP base are still strongly opposed to gun control of any kind. In Tuesday's hearing, which was scheduled before the Colorado shooting, Republicans showed no signs of wavering. Texas Sen. Ted Cruz said that every time there is a shooting, the Senate engages in "ridiculous theater," with Democrats proposing laws that he said could take guns away from law-abiding citizens. Republicans have argued that background checks would not stop most mass shootings and would prevent some lawful gun owners from purchasing firearms. "We already know this pattern is predictable, over and over and over again," Cruz said. □

Associated Press



# California bill aims to jumpstart 'microstamps' on handguns

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP)

— Gun control advocates are making a new attempt to force the gun industry to comply with California's unique law requiring individual identifiers on all bullet casings, a mandate that has been toothless since it was approved in 2007.

The law requires gun manufacturers to adopt microstamping technology on new types of handguns introduced in California.

The intent was to imprint a unique set of microscopic characters on all cartridge casings when weapons are fired, linking bullet casings to the guns that discharged them.

Gun makers have said the technology is unreliable and to get around the law have not introduced new gun models in the state since the law was passed.

New legislation would expand the law to include weapons used by law enforcement, which are currently exempt. The thinking is that forcing police officers into the marketplace would prompt manufacturers to improve technology so they can sell the weapons to members of law enforcement.

The bill by Democratic Assemblyman Jesse Gabriel, co-founder of the Legislature's Gun Violence Prevention Working Group, would add law enforcement starting in 2023.



In this June 11, 2019, file photo, Chris Puehse, owner of Foothill Ammo, displays .45-caliber ammunition for sale at his store in Shingle Springs, Calif.

Associated Press

"The main priority here is to really overcome the obstinance from gun manufacturers," Gabriel told The Associated Press. "They've resisted at every step of the way."

Mark Oliva, spokesman for the National Shooting Sports Foundation that is the trade association for the firearm industry, said microstamping is an "unworkable technology."

It could take up to 10 bullet casings to piece together one complete digital identifier that could determine the weapon that fired the bullets, he said.

"It sounds great on paper but ...it doesn't hold up. All it does is infringe on the rights of law-abiding citizens and make firearms unavailable to them," Oliva said.

Moreover, he said, the technology could be easily defeated by sanding the microstamp off the firing pin in much the same way that criminals currently erase guns' serial numbers.

As a result, Oliva said, "I don't see how this would help to solve crime or resolve criminal misuse of firearms."

The microstamps also would eventually wear off

of the firing pins, Oliva said, because law enforcement officers may fire thousands of rounds with their service weapons in training alone. Last year, California enacted a law easing the requirement for two microstamps on each shell casing to one, with proponents citing legal filings in which the industry said it could meet that standard. Another bill this year would keep the two-stamp requirement in place until July 2022.

The Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence, which is affiliated with the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, last

month released a report touting the technology's potential to link cartridge casings recovered at crime scenes to specific firearms without having to recover the firearm itself.

But gunowners' rights groups are challenging the California law before the same federal judge who has already rejected the state's ban on ammunition magazines holding more than 10 bullets and its law requiring background checks to buy ammunition, decisions that the state is appealing to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. U.S. District Judge Roger Benitez in San Diego is also considering throwing out the state's ban on assault weapons.

Aside from the microstamping requirement, the groups object to a provision of the law that would require the state to remove three models of handguns from its approved list for every new model allowed to be sold in California starting July 1, 2022. That will continue to choke off consumers' choice in violation of gun owners' constitutional rights, the suit contends.

Firearms Policy Coalition president Brandon Combs, one of the plaintiffs, said "we see no chance that law enforcement will allow the government to make them follow the same rules that citizens must." □

# Marine commander fired after deadly assault vehicle accident



In this Monday, Aug. 3, 2020, file photo, provided by the U.S. Navy, Undersea Rescue Command deploys the Sibitzky Remotely Operated Vehicle to recover the bodies of nine people killed when a Marine landing craft sank in hundreds of feet of water on July 30, 2020, off the Southern California coast.

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — A U.S. Marine Corps commander was fired Tuesday following an investigation into the sinking of an amphibious assault vehicle in the ocean off Southern California that killed nine service members last year.

Col. Christopher J. Bronzi was relieved of command of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit by Lt. Gen. Steven R. Rudder, commander of U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Pacific, a statement said. Rudder relieved Bronzi "due to a loss of trust and confidence in his ability to command," the statement said. The amphibious assault

vehicle had 16 people aboard when it sank rapidly in 385 feet (117 meters) of water off the coast of San Clemente Island on July 30, 2020, while it was returning to a Navy ship.

Seven Marines were rescued. One Marine was pronounced dead at the scene, and the bodies of seven Marines and a Navy hospital corpsman were later recovered by an underwater team.

In October, Lt. Col. Michael J. Regner was relieved of command of the landing team of the 1st Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, 15th MEU, based on "a substan-

tial amount of information and data," according to a statement that also cited loss of trust.

A report on the cause of the sinking has yet to be released. Col. Fridrik Fridriksson was named to take over command of the 15th MEU, which is based at Camp Pendleton, California, and is currently deployed in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, the Marine Corps said.

San Clemente Island, lying about 70 miles (112.6 kilometers) northwest of San Diego, is a training ground for the Marine Corps and Navy. □



# Illinois city 1st in U.S. to offer Black residents reparations

**EVANSTON, Ill. (AP)** — Using tax money from the sale of recreational marijuana, the Chicago suburb of Evanston has become the first U.S. city to make reparations available to its Black residents for past discrimination and the lingering effects of slavery. The City Council on Monday voted 8-1 to begin making good on its pledge to distribute \$10 million over the next 10 years with the distribution of \$400,000 to eligible Black households. Each qualifying household would receive \$25,000 for home repairs, down payments on property, and interest or late penalties on property in the city.

The move by the Illinois community comes as hundreds of communities and organizations across the country are considering providing reparations. In Evanston, besides revenue from a 3% tax on the sale of recreational marijuana, a small portion of the money — \$21,340 — is coming to the city in private donations.

Qualifying residents must either have lived in or been a direct descendant of a Black person who lived in Evanston between 1919 to



In this Nov. 25, 2019 file photo, Alderman Robin Rue Simmons, 5th Ward, proposes a reparations fund during a City Council meeting in Evanston, Ill.

Associated Press

1969, or that person's direct descendant, who suffered discrimination in housing because of city ordinances, policies or practices. Also, residents who also experienced discrimination due to the city's policies or practices after 1969 can qualify.

Alderman Robin Rue Simmons, who proposed the program that was adopted

in 2019, said groups in support of reparations have offered pro-bono legal assistance if the program is challenged in court.

"This is set aside for an injured community that happens to be Black, that was injured by the city of Evanston for anti-Black housing policies," Simmons said.

At the same time, Simmons suggested that the money

is just a start to right the wrongs of the past.

"We all know that the road to repair and justice in the Black community is going to be a generation of work," Simmons said. "It's going to be many programs and initiatives, and more funding." The City Council acted after dozens of citizens addressed the body and the plan received some push-

back from several.

Alderman Cicely Fleming, the lone vote against the plan, said she supports reparations, but what the City Council was debating is a housing plan that is being called reparations. She said the people should dictate the terms of how their grievances are repaired. Fleming described the program as paternalistic, and it assumes Black people can't manage their own money. Other communities and organizations considering providing reparations range from the state of California to cities like Amherst, Massachusetts, Providence, Rhode Island, Asheville, North Carolina, and Iowa City, Iowa; religious denominations like the Episcopal Church; and prominent colleges like Georgetown University in Washington. The efforts, some of which have been underway for years, have gained momentum in the wake of the death of George Floyd in police custody last May in Minneapolis. President Joe Biden has even expressed support for creating a federal commission to study Black reparations, a proposal that's languished for decades in Congress. □

# Care home fire leaves resident dead, firefighter missing



Firefighters monitor hotspots from a fire that burned down the Evergreen Court Home for Adults, Tuesday, March 23, 2021, in Spring Valley, N.Y.

Associated Press

**SPRING VALLEY, N.Y. (AP)** — A fire swept through a suburban New York assisted living home and caused a partial collapse early Tuesday, killing one resident and leaving a firefighter

missing, officials said. Two other firefighters and multiple other residents were sent to hospitals. A second resident thought for several hours to be missing was later found unharmed,

officials said.

Flames gutted the Evergreen Court Home for Adults in the Rockland County community of Spring Valley, about 30 miles (48 kilometers) north of New York City. It had an estimated 100 to 125 residents, but authorities were working to determine the exact number, Rockland County Fire coordinator Chris Kear said.

One resident died after being taken to a hospital, Kear said. The person's name was not immediately released.

"This was a devastating loss," Kear said at a news briefing. Rescuers searched through rubble for a firefighter who issued a mayday call from the third floor, Kear said. Other firefighters rushed to

try to help their colleague, but the flames were too intense.

"The extent of the fire, the volume of fire, the conditions, were just too unbearable where firefighters went in it, and they just could not locate the firefighter, and they had to back out," he said at a later news conference.

Authorities initially said they believed a resident the missing firefighter was trying to rescue was unaccounted for, as well. They said that person was later found but provided no details. Two other firefighters were taken to hospitals. One was released, while the other was expected to stay overnight for treatment for smoke inhalation, Kear said.

Officials believe about 20

residents were taken to hospitals, some with serious injuries, Kear said.

Other residents were taken by bus to another facility, state Trooper Steven Nevel said.

U.S. Rep. Mondaire Jones said he was horrified to learn of the fire in his hometown of Spring Valley.

"I am deeply saddened by the death of a resident of the Evergreen facility, and I am praying that the firefighter who bravely risked his life to save dozens of individuals trapped inside will be found safe and alive," the first-term Democrat said in a statement.

About 125 firefighters from many agencies worked to get the fire under control. Investigators worked to determine the cause of the fire. □



# NATO affirms unity, tries to put Trump era behind it

By LORNE COOK

Associated Press

**BRUSSELS (AP)** — NATO foreign ministers on Tuesday reaffirmed their commitment to defend each other against outside attack and underlined the strength of relations between North America and Europe, after four years of doubt and concern among some allies under the Trump administration.

"We are now opening a new chapter in our trans-Atlantic relationship," NATO-Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters after chairing the talks. He thanked President Joe Biden for committing "to rebuild the strength of this alliance" and make it "future-proof in a more competitive world."

In a formal joint statement aimed at turning a page on the Trump era, the ministers said: "We are meeting in Brussels to reaffirm the enduring transatlantic bond between Europe and North America, with NATO at its heart."

The ministers, including U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, also committed to the collective defense



**U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, fourth right, and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, third left, wear protective masks as they stand with NATO foreign ministers for a socially distanced group photo during a meeting of NATO foreign ministers at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Tuesday, March 23, 2021.**

clause Article 5 of NATO's founding treaty under which an attack against one ally shall be considered an attack against them all. It has only been activated once by NATO, after the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington.

Former U.S. President Donald Trump often criticized

NATO partners for failing to pay their defense dues, claiming falsely that they owed the alliance or the United States money.

Early in his tenure, he threatened not to come to the defense of any country that did not meet NATO spending guidelines, causing deep concern among

member nations close to Russia's borders, like Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. The ministers noted that members of the 30-nation alliance "are making good progress on fairer trans-Atlantic burden sharing; we welcome the efforts made by all Allies in Europe and North America

that contribute to our indivisible security. We must and will do more."

They also vowed that NATO would continue to adapt in the face of "rising threats and systemic competition," and underlined that "Russia's aggressive actions constitute a threat to Euro-Atlantic security."

Earlier, Blinken said that the U.S. is "determined to revitalize our alliances, to revitalize our partnerships, starting with NATO."

"When we look at virtually all of the challenges that we face as a country and that are actually going to potentially affect the lives of our citizens, not a single one of them can be effectively dealt with by any one country acting alone, even the United States with all of the resources that we have," he said. The U.S. is by far the biggest and most influential member of NATO, and Trump also surprised, confounded and sometimes angered allies with unilateral decisions, like pulling U.S. troops out of Afghanistan and northern Syria. France complained about a lack of U.S. leadership at NATO. □

Associated Press

## Iraq requests new round of talks with U.S. over troop presence

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA

Associated Press

**BAGHDAD (AP)** — Iraq has sent a formal request to President Joe Biden's administration for a date to resume strategic talks on bilateral relations and the withdrawal of remaining U.S. combat forces, Iraqi officials said Tuesday.

The talks, which began in June under the Trump administration, would be the first under Biden, who assumed office in January. The discussions are meant to shape the future of the U.S.-Iraq relationship.

Relations between the two countries have been fraught with tension, particularly following the U.S. airstrike in January 2020 that killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi

militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis just outside the Baghdad airport.

Outraged, Iraqi lawmakers, spurred by Shiite political factions, passed a non-binding resolution to oust U.S.-led coalition forces from the country following the attack.

Relations have improved since Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi took over the helm of Iraq's government in May. But some parties, notably parliament's Iran-backed Fatah bloc, continue to call for the withdrawal of U.S. forces.

So far, two sessions of strategic talks have been held — in June and August. Among the issues on the agenda laid out ahead of the talks were the presence of U.S. troops in the

country, militia groups acting outside of state authority and Iraq's dire economic crisis.

The U.S. blames Iran-backed Shiite Iraqi militias for numerous attacks targeting U.S. personnel and interests in Iraq.

According to three government officials, Iraq recently sent an official memo to the U.S. requesting a date for a new round of discussions on bilateral relations and specifically, the withdrawal of remaining combat forces.

The memo was given to U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Mathew Tueller earlier this month, they said, adding the Iraqis hope to have the discussion in April. The officials spoke to The Associated Press on condition of



**In this Jan. 13, 2020 file photo, U.S. Soldiers stand at a site of Iranian bombing at Ain al-Asad air base in Anbar, Iraq.**

Associated Press

anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media. No immediate date has been set.

Iraqi and U.S. officials have said they support a scheduled withdrawal of forces from Iraq, but questions re-

main over time-frames and the scope of the threat posed by the Islamic State group. According to the Pentagon, the number of U.S. troops in Iraq has dropped to about 2,500 over the past months. □



# Myanmar junta defends crackdown, accuses Suu Kyi of graft

**YANGON, Myanmar (AP)** —

Myanmar's military junta on Tuesday took the offensive to try to justify last month's coup and subsequent actions against those opposed to it, even as street demonstrations continued against the takeover.

At a news conference in the capital Naypyitaw, the military presented a video of a former political colleague of ousted national leader Aung San Suu Kyi claiming he had handed over large amounts of cash and gold to her personally, in what the military has characterized as corruption. Such allegations were previously denied by her lawyer.

Many of the protests Tuesday were staged in a way that avoided confrontations with authorities, who have not hesitated to use lethal force to break up demonstrations. Some marches were held before dawn in Yangon, the country's biggest city, and elsewhere and went unmolested. Other protests adopted the tactic of having signboards or other inanimate



**People push a stretcher with body of a man who a doctor said was shot and killed Tuesday, March 23, 2021, by Myanmar security forces during anti coup protest in Mandalay, Myanmar.**

**Associated Press**

objects lined up in the street to serve as proxies for human demonstrators. The independent Assistance Association for Political Prisoners has verified 261 protesters' deaths nationwide but says the actual total, including cases where verification has been difficult, is probably much

higher. It said 2,682 people have also been arrested or charged since the coup, with 2,302 still detained or sought for arrest.

In its news conference, the military presented displays of seized homemade weapons and videos of street battles to argue that the demonstrators are vio-

lent and that its efforts to stop them are justified. However, in the weeks since the Feb. 1 coup, protesters only began using organized violence after more than 100 demonstrators had been shot dead by police and soldiers. The allegations against Suu Kyi made by former Yangon Chief Min-

ister Phyto Min Thein were first mentioned by the military several weeks ago. Last week the military-controlled Myawaddy TV station aired a similar video with a construction magnate who also claimed to have made large payoffs to Suu Kyi. That video was replayed at Tuesday's news conference.

No supporting evidence for the allegations has been offered, and they are generally dismissed as an effort by the military to frame Suu Kyi so she can be discredited and tried on a serious criminal charge. She is already being held on several more minor charges.

A report in the state-controlled Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper on Tuesday said the junta has expressed fresh concern about civil servants, teachers and medical workers joining the Civil Disobedience Movement that is the vanguard group opposing last month's military takeover. The report referred to the opposition group as CDM, the initials by which it is popularly known. □

## Japan asks IAEA support for Fukushima tank water release

**By MARI YAMAGUCHI**  
**Associated Press**

**TOKYO (AP)** — Japan on Tuesday asked the International Atomic Energy Agency for support carrying out the future release of massive amounts of treated but still-radioactive

water from the wrecked Fukushima nuclear power plant, most likely into the sea.

Japan wants international atomic experts to help evaluate the methods, handling and facilities ahead of the release, and

to provide quality control and environmental monitoring once it begins. Japan's Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Hiroshi Kajiyama held an online talk with IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi.

Grossi said the IAEA will give full backing to Kajiyama's request for a safety review of the release of radioactive water into the sea, once Japan makes a final decision. The two sides also agreed to cooperate in the plant's decommissioning.

The release is expected to start in about two years, part of the plant's already difficult decommissioning process, which will likely take decades. A government panel's recommendation that the radioactive water be gradually released into the sea has faced fierce opposition

from local residents, and a decision is still pending.

Kajiyama told Grossi that his government is now in the final stage before announcing what to do with the water. Japanese officials have said the country will ensure the highest levels of safety and transparency, in order to gain understanding from the international community about the planned water release. In 2011, a powerful magnitude 9.0 earthquake and tsunami damaged the Fukushima plant's cooling systems, causing three reactor cores to melt and nuclear fuel to fall to the bottom of their primary containment vessels.

In the decade since, cooling water has been escaping constantly from the damaged primary containment vessels into the basements of the reactor

buildings. To make up for the loss, additional cooling water has been pumped into the reactors to cool the melted fuel remaining inside them. Water is also pumped out and treated, part of which is recycled as cooling water, and the remainder stored in around 1,000 tanks.

Both Tokyo Electric Power Co., which operates the plant, and the government are currently stuck with some 1.24 million tons of radioactive water, while also facing the public's concerns about radiation and distrust regarding TEPCO's safety culture.

The operator says the tanks' 1.37-million-ton storage capacity will be full in 2022, and that tanks will need to be removed to make room to build decommissioning facilities. □



**In this Feb. 27, 2021, file photo, the Pacific Ocean looks over nuclear reactor units of No. 3, left, and 4 at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Okuma town, Fukushima prefecture, northeastern Japan.**

**Associated Press**





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## Democrats pressure Biden to review U.S. sanctions on Venezuela

By JOSHUA GOODMAN  
Associated Press Writer

**MIAMI (AP)** — A U.S. senator urged the Biden administration Tuesday to lift a ban on diesel fuel swaps with Venezuela, adding to pressure from some Democrats and aid workers who argue sanctions are worsening the South American country's dire humanitarian crisis.

The Trump administration in November barred non-U.S. companies from sending diesel to Venezuela in exchange for the country's crude oil. Previously, such swaps had been exempted from U.S. sanctions aimed at ousting President Nicolás Maduro because of the critical role diesel plays in public transport and helping farmers move food supplies to market in diesel-powered trucks. Sen. Chris Murphy of Connecticut, a Democratic member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, sent a letter to Secretary of



In this March 3, 2021 file photo, youths who cull through trash for items to resell ride on the back of a garbage truck entering the Pavia landfill on the outskirts of Barquisimeto, Venezuela.

Associated Press

State Anthony Blinken calling for the U.S. to end what he called the "misguided" policy. He said that immediately restoring diesel swaps would "provide lifesaving relief for millions of Venezu-

elans" as current diesel reserves are expected to run critically low by April. The ban "has created no real political leverage with Maduro, who was able to maneuver around the uni-

lateral sanctions, and instead threatens to severely worsen the already dire humanitarian situation in the country," Murphy wrote in the letter, a copy of which was provided to The Asso-

ciated Press.

Murphy's request comes as the Biden administration reviews U.S. policy toward Venezuela with the goal of building a multilateral front against Maduro and ensuring humanitarian aid gets to Venezuelans in need. It also would seem to reinforce tentative steps by Maduro and the U.S.-backed opposition to work together to jointly address Venezuela's crisis, beginning with a deal to import badly needed coronavirus vaccines.

It's an approach favored by many in the Democratic party as well as aid workers in Venezuela who are seeking a recalibration of U.S. sanctions policy. Last fall, a group of 115 organizations and individuals in the U.S. and Venezuela wrote then Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warning of "devastating consequences" for regular Venezuelans as a result of the diesel ban. □

## EU lawmakers refuse to sign off on border agency's budget

**BRUSSELS (AP)** — European Union lawmakers on Tuesday refused to sign off on the budget of the EU's border and coast guard agency over concerns about allegations of rights violations, hiring failures and harassment by senior Frontex staff.

The European Parliament's Budgetary Control Committee voted by 22-3, with five abstentions to postpone their endorsement of Frontex's 2019 budget "until additional clarifications are brought on a series of issues."

Frontex, which supervises the outside borders of the 27-nation EU, is under pres-

sure following a series of allegations that it was involved in the illegal pushbacks of migrants, notably in the Aegean Sea between Greece and Turkey. An official inquiry cleared it of links to the pushback claims, but criticized reporting and monitoring failures. Some EU lawmakers are calling for the Frontex chief to resign. The European Parliament has also set up its own "scrutiny group," which is expected to release its findings on the agency over the summer. Frontex was supposed to have hired 40 fundamental rights officers by December to help monitor for pos-

sible abuses, but has so far employed none. A number of senior positions at the agency also remain unfilled. With Tuesday's vote, the lawmakers "expressed strong concerns as regards the delays in the process of recruitment of the fundamental rights officer and monitors" and "the significant gender imbalance, in particular at the level of the management board." They also raised reports about cases of harassment and possible meetings between Frontex staff and company lobbyists, and they want the assembly's scrutiny group more deeply involved in the investiga-

tion of pushbacks. The decision to delay the budget endorsement is

likely to be backed by the full parliament in a vote next month. □



In this Friday, Feb. 28, 2020 file photo, migrants arrive aboard a dinghy accompanied by a Frontex vessel at the village of Skala Sikaminias, on the Greek island of Lesbos, after crossing the Aegean sea from Turkey.

Associated Press



## Medlab Aruba 'fit-2-fly': Covid-19 testing on the island

**NOORD** — While on vacation, the last thing you need to worry about is what to do or where to go for your COVID-19 testing. Many countries, including the U.S. require for all passengers heading back home to present with a negative test result for PCR or Antigen 72 hours prior to departure.



only fully integrated digital booking platform on the island that allows guests to pre-register for the testing prior to coming to Aruba and have all their information incorporated upon entry to any of the available testing centers. Guests will receive a confirmation email with QR-code that will be requested upon day of testing to facilitate a faster turn-around time for your results.

### Testing options

Offering three method of testing gives you, our island visitors, the possibility to choose which service is at your convenience. Recommended time to complete test prior to departure is 48 (72) hours. We also request for you to bring your passport to the appointment.

**Hassle free scheduling – QR-code**  
The laboratory has invested on the



Testing Option 1: Walk-In service at our location in Noord Medical Center (NMC), Noord 63 or at Superfood COVID Testing Center. You may also book online at [WWW.COVIDARUBA.COM](http://WWW.COVIDARUBA.COM) and choose location.

Testing Option 2: On-site at participating hotels. Only guests staying on these properties will be allowed to conduct the test. Appointment is also made online at [WWW.COVIDARUBA.COM](http://WWW.COVIDARUBA.COM).

The participating hotels with testing facilities are Aruba Marriott Resort (Stellaris, Ocean and Surf Club), Holiday Inn, Playa Linda Beach Resort, RIU Antillas, RIU Palace, Eagle Resort, Costa Linda Beach Resort, Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort, Manchebo Beach Resort, Casa del Mar & Aruba Beach Club, Caribbean Palm Village.

Testing Option 3: Airbnb/ Other hotel location. We come to you for the test together with our vehicular

Mobile Health Test Unit. We require a minimum of six people for this service. Request/ Book appointment through WhatsApp number +297 5975548.

### Price

Offering a great rate for the testing. The Antigen test is at \$50 and the PCR at \$100. Payment method is card (preferred), cash (hygiene measures).

The COVID Test is not covered by the Aruba Visitor's Insurance, but you are able to seek reimbursement once back home.

### Results

Turn-around time for results is within 24 hours. Result is sent electronically to your email (check spam/ junk folder)

For more information visit [www.covidaruba.com](http://www.covidaruba.com), call us at +297 5975548 or email us at [covid@lab.aw](mailto:covid@lab.aw).

## Honoring of Goodwill Ambassadors Paul & Sarah Westle



**PALM BEACH** — Recently, Marouska Heyliger had the great pleasure to honor a Loyal and friendly visitors of Aruba as Goodwill Ambassadors at their home away from home. The symbolic honorary title is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism, as a token of appreciation to the guests who visit Aruba between 10-20-35 and more consecutive years.

The honorees were **Mr. Paul & Sarah Westle** residents of Elkins Park, Pennsylvania.

The Westle's stated that they love coming to Aruba for so many rea-



sons specially the staff at the Hyatt. "They make you feel better than a guest; they make you feel like family. The weather & facilities are always perfect. The Aruban people are always pleasant and accommodating and the food island wide is delicious & healthy."

The lovely couple is looking forward to coming to their second home for many more years.

Heyliger together with the members of Hyatt Regency Aruba Resort Spa and Casino, presented the lovely couple with their certificate and some gifts and thanked them for choosing Aruba as their vacation destination and as their home away from home for so many years. □



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Article by Etnia Nativa

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Etnia Nativa is close to high rise Hotels



## The four elements

## Episode XCVII- 97

**NOORD** — According to the ancient Greek concept of the four basic elements of nature these are the different ways in which energy manifests itself. Each and every one of them is our energy centers and defines us much more than we think. Although it is easy to identify them: earth, air, fire and water, when we talk about their meaning, things get a little more complicated. It's important to know the mystical meaning of them because it is the way to get to know the world, to respect it and to be aware of what surrounds us and also what shapes us.

Water is the first of the elements and essential for life. Every living being is made up of water and without it, we could not survive. The water element is directly related to the feminine part that each individual has, with calm, peace and serenity. Also if we relate this element with the unconscious we will know that water has a lot to do with our hidden desires.

Fire represents all the energy that is in each one of us. There are a large number of symbols related to fire. It is the element that gives us the possibility of starting over and being reborn. The importance of the fire element



lies in the rebirth of our spirit, but also in its majesty and luminosity. Although as an element in itself it allows us to protect ourselves from the cold, it is the element that makes us move towards our true being.

The earth element represents the solid, what we can see and touch what feeds us that what refers to the countryside and agriculture, what feeds us and at the same time represents the purest nature. From the earth we come and to the earth we shall return. It is an element which gives us stability; hence the expression "put your feet on the ground". The earth gives us the balance that each one of us needs to navigate our destiny. The element air is everywhere, it allows us to live, and to breathe. It is related to the arts, poetry, dance and

music. The air gives us true beauty. This element is energy and the air is related to everything that is behind the material world and everything that we can perceive with our thoughts. We can think of air as the opposite of the material and completely linked to abstract thought. □

To get to know more over Aruba's and its origins, its animals and culture, we highly recommend you to book your visit for our renowned cultural encounter session has been entertaining curious participants for decades.

Mail us at [etnianativa03@gmail.com](mailto:etnianativa03@gmail.com) to confirm your participation. Our facilities and activities take place close to high rise hotels.





# Asi es mi Peru launches quality Food Truck at Eagle Beach

**EAGLE BEACH —** While operating two successful restaurants at Paradise Beach Villas- Eagle Beach, The Kitchen Table (TKT) and Asi es mi Peru (AEMP) who are both under one roof, COVID-19 interrupted operations of both restaurants and each and every restaurant in Aruba in March this year. TKT was closed temporarily, AEMP kept operating for take out in the weekends, operating lunch and dinner again in the weekends until fully operational in July.

It became clear says owner Roxanna Salinas, "that we would not be able to maintain all of the staff with hotel occupancies of around twenty percent once the tourists started returning slowly in August." But we saw it as an obligation to maintain all of our staff as one family!

And that's when the idea of extending our services with a food truck was born so we could make sure to keep all of our staff who otherwise would be out of a job. A



perfect food truck with all whistles and bells appeared on the horizon and with permits filed the food truck made her appearance at Eagle Beach at the end of September. Just, 100 yards from the restaurant at the corner of the T-crossing between Paradise Beach Villas and La Cabana. Convenient to offer a large scale of products!

## Best ceviche and grilled chicken on the island

Our now famous ceviche, insiders say the best ceviche on the island, is a best seller and our roasted chicken (pollo a la brasa) are favorite items but hotdogs, hamburgers, salads, soups and wraps, empanadas and pastechis are just a few of the items offered. Actually, there are no restrictions as the entire Asi

es mi Peru menu is available converted from dollars to florins. While most food trucks in Aruba operate in the evening and night the AEMP Food Truck operates from 11.00 am – 9 pm. Every day with the exception of Monday, orders can be called in at +297 592-5699 and picked up at the food truck.

## Mi Retiro (My Retirement)

"When I married Roxanna says co-operator Jan van Nes, I knew that the word retirement was not in her vocabulary. Now, a retired hotelier for two years, I know that somewhere down the road there will always be something to do, even when our two restaurants would be operated by a younger generation. With this perspective the Food Truck could be called "Mi Retiro (My Retirement)."

For reservations for The Kitchen Table ([www.thekitchenableinaruba.com](http://www.thekitchenableinaruba.com)), Asi es Mi Peru ([www.asiesperuena-aruba.com](http://www.asiesperuena-aruba.com)) and take-out orders, feel free to call Roxanna at +297 592-5699. We love to welcome you! ☐



## Treasures of nature

**SANTA CRUZ —** Aruba National Park Foundation manages the Arikok National Park and 16 other nature reserves, as well as 4 marine protected areas. Discover some of Aruba's natural treasures in our national park and nature reserves.

### Man-of-War (Physalia physalis)

All kinds of things are washing up on our shores these days ... marine debris, sargassum seaweed and even Portuguese Man-of-War (Physalia physalis). The Portuguese Man-of-War is not a jellyfish, but a siphonophore: a colony of specialized animals called zooids that work together as one. It

was named after its resemblance to 18th century Portuguese warships. Portuguese Man-of-War do not swim but instead float on the surface, using wind and ocean currents to propel forward. Its tentacles - which it uses for capturing and eating fish and other small creatures - can grow as long as 50 meters (165 feet).

Beware: a Man-of-War sting is excruciatingly painful and even dead. Man-of-Wars washed up on shore can still deliver a sting.

### The Teco (Bromelia humilis)

This is a ground bromeliad that readily grows in our dry climate, preferring hilly landscapes and

some shade. It is well known for its purple flowers in a bright, red "heart" and its thorny, green leaves that grow in a rosette.

The plant protects soil from evaporation and therefore plays an important role in healthy and resilient terrestrial ecosystems. It can still be found in Curacao's Christoffel National Park but has been overharvested and is now nearly extinct in the wild in Aruba and Bonaire. Some locals do still have them in their gardens, where they are easily propagated through their runners, grow profusely and provide ample ground cover in a short period of time. You can also come and admire them in our



Hofi Shon Shoco, FPNA's wildlife garden.

For more information visit the facebook page Aruba National Park Foundation. ☐

**Source: Aruba National Park Foundation**



# Tourism groups push U.S. to eliminate travel restrictions

By **DAVID KOENIG**  
**AP Airlines Writer**

Airlines and other tourism-related businesses are pushing the White House to draw up a plan in the next five weeks to boost international travel and eliminate restrictions that were imposed early in the pandemic.

More than two dozen groups made their request in a letter to the White House on Monday.

They want people who have been vaccinated against COVID-19 to be exempt from testing requirements before entering the United States. They also want the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to say that vaccinated people can travel safely. The groups say those and other steps will speed up the recovery of the travel and airline industries, which have been devastated by a plunge in travel during the pandemic.

U.S. air travel is already picking up. More than 1 million people have passed



In this Wednesday, March 17, 2021 file photo, travelers walk through the Salt Lake City International Airport in Salt Lake City.

through U.S. airport checkpoints each of the last 11 days, with Sunday's total topping more than 1.5 million for the first time in more than a year. Passenger traffic is still below 2019 levels, however.

The organizations calling

for relaxing international restrictions include the chief trade group for the nation's largest carriers, Airlines for America, the U.S. Travel Association and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. They set a May 1 target for the government "to part-

ner with us" on a plan to rescind year-old restrictions on international travel.

The groups cited the recent decline in reported new cases, hospitalizations and deaths related to COVID-19 in the United States. Nearly 45 million Ameri-

Associated Press

cans, more than 13% of the population, have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, according to CDC figures.

"The time to plan for and chart a defined roadmap to reopen international travel is now," they wrote in a letter to White House virus-response coordinator Jeffrey Zients.

The White House did not comment but referred to remarks by CDC Director Rochelle Walensky on Monday. Walensky said the health agency is working on new guidance for people who are vaccinated, but raised concern about recent increases in new reported cases of coronavirus in many European countries.

"If we look at our European friends, we just don't want to be at this rapid uptick of cases again, and that is very possible that that could happen," she said. "We are so close to vaccinating so many more people .... Now is not the time to travel." □

## Survey: Business economists favor increased federal spending

By **MARTIN CRUTSINGER**  
**AP Economics Writer**  
**WASHINGTON (AP)** — A

majority of business economists think the recovering economy will benefit from much more government spending despite concerns in financial markets that the \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief measure Congress recently enacted could ignite inflation.

That's the view that emerged from a survey released Monday by the National Association for Business Economics of 205 forecasters. The economists were polled while the new relief measure was under consideration in Congress but before it was signed into law.

The relief package, proposed by President Joe Biden and backed only by Democrats in Congress, is distributing \$1,400 checks to most adults, renewing federal aid for the unemployed and supplying



A man walks past the signs of an employment agency, Tuesday, March 2, 2021, in Manchester, N.H.

another round of help to small businesses, among other things. But some economists and many Republicans have expressed concern that the size of the package could accelerate inflation and potentially force the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates prematurely.

Yet among the business economists surveyed by the NABE, 41 percent describe the government's current fiscal policy, including such spending,

as "about right," and an additional 25% call it too restrictive. Only 34% characterize the current fiscal policy as too stimulative for the economy, though that figure is up sharply from the 17% who said so in August, when the NABE conducted its previous survey.

Last week, the Fed issued forecasts from its policymakers that showed they expect to keep their benchmark short-term rate near zero through 2023. But the NABE survey found

that the vast majority of the respondents believe the Fed's first rate hike will come earlier, with nearly three in five predicting that the central bank will start raising rates before the end of 2022.

The survey found that 12% of respondents think the Fed will even start hiking rates this year; 46% believe it will start in 2022. An additional 28% of the economists said they think the first Fed rate increases will occur before the end of 2023. Only 12% of the NABE economists who responded to the survey felt the Fed would stick with its forecast that it will keep its key rate near zero through at least 2023 to provide continued support to the economy.

At a news conference last week after the Fed's latest policy meeting, Chair Jerome Powell stressed that the central bank wants to see substantial improve-

ment in the job market and the economy. The Fed's forecasts show it doesn't expect the unemployment rate, now at 6.2%, to return to its pre-pandemic level of 3.5% until late 2023.

After the eruption of the pandemic flattened the economy last March, the Fed cut its benchmark short-term rate to a record-tying low near zero, where it had been pinned for seven years after the 2008 financial crisis. At his news conference, Powell said the Fed expects to see a temporary jump in inflation this spring but thinks price increases will settle down once the economy has fully re-opened.

The NABE economists express less confidence. A majority said they thought inflation risks are higher now than in the past two decades, when inflation remained persistently below the Fed's 2% annual target. □

Associated Press



# As endangered birds lose their songs, they can't find mates

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — Male songbirds usually learn their tunes from adult mentors. But when aspiring crooners lack proper role models, they hit all the wrong notes — and have less success attracting mates.

For five years, ecologist Ross Crates has tracked the singing ability and breeding success of critically endangered regent honeyeaters. These distinctive black and yellow birds were once common across Australia, but habitat loss since the 1950s has shrunk their population to only about 300 or 400 wild birds today.

While male birds once formed large winter flocks, now they are sparsely distributed across the landscape, so many fly solo. That means fewer honeyeater mentors are nearby during young birds' impressionable first year.

"Song learning in many birds is a process similar to humans learning languages — they learn by listening to other individuals," said Crates, who is based at Australian National University.

"If you can't listen to other individuals, you don't know what you should be learning."

The researchers found that



This 2015 photo provided by Lachlan Hall shows male regent honeyeater birds in Capertee Valley in New South Wales, Australia.

Associated Press

a significant portion of male birds appear to be learning tunes exclusively from other species they encounter. About 12% of male regent honeyeaters wind up producing mangled versions of songs typically sung by noisy friarbirds and black-faced cuckooshrikes, among other species.

In some species, such as mockingbirds, song mimicry adds flourish to love songs. But the female re-

gent honeyeaters aren't impressed.

Unconventional male singers were less successful in wooing mates, the scientists found in research published Tuesday in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*. "We think the females are avoiding breeding and nesting with males that sing unusual songs," Crates said.

For a population already on the brink of extinction,

that's worrisome.

"This research suggests that the loss of a song language once the population reaches a very small size could accelerate their decline," said Peter Marra, a conservation biologist at Georgetown University who was not involved in the paper.

The precise reason females remained aloof was not clear.

"When male birds sing, it's

like putting out an ad saying, 'I'm over here, I'm species X, I'm Bob, and I'm really interested in finding a partner,'" said Scott Ramsay, a behavioral ecologist at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario, who was not involved in the research.

It could be that female honeyeaters aren't even recognizing these unconventional singers as potential partners, and so they're not approaching them, he said. Or it could be that they approach, "but then things go wrong if the males get courtship signals wrong."

Most male birds spend several months in their first year learning and refining the songs they'll recite for the rest of their lives. Some birds learn from their fathers, but regent honeyeaters leave the nest before they learn to sing, so the males need to find other mentors.

"We need to be aware of the importance of preserving song culture in birds — it's possible to have a population that's still genetically viable, but isn't viable in terms of passing on cultural knowledge," said Carl Safina, an ecologist at Stony Brook University who was not involved in the research. □

# U.S. weather model upgraded to better forecast extreme events

**BY SETH BORENSTEIN**

The National Weather Service has turbocharged its lagging forecast model

to better predict extreme weather events such as hurricanes, blizzards and downpours, as well as day-

to-day weather.

By including much higher layers of the atmosphere, increased factoring of

ocean waves and other improvements, the weather service's update to its Global Forecast System is

trying to catch up with a European weather model that many experts consider superior.

Tests for the past two years show the upgrade, which kicked in Monday, forecast heavy rains and snowfall 15% better five days out and improved hurricane and tropical storm tracks by more than 10%, better pinpointing storm formation five to seven days in advance.

One main improvement is that the new model captures the atmosphere up to 50 miles high (80 kilometers) — far higher than the old one and has higher resolution at different levels, weather service officials said. This way it better characterizes the jet stream, which transports storms, they said. □

**TODAY**  
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**Downtown**

**Conceptis Sudoku**  
By Dave Green

			6	7	8			
		9				2		
	3	5				1	6	
5								9
2								8
	1	3	8		5	4	7	
			2		4			
		2				3		
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Acc. #23951903  
RBC Royal Bank Acc. #1330772

## Assistant Director

Xiomara Arends

## Editors

Liza Koolman (Management assistant)

Richard Brooks

Linda Reijnders

## Sales

Linda Reijnders

(linda.reijnders@cspnv.com)

Sulaika Croes

## Classifieds

classified@cspnv.com

## Distribution and Collection

accounting@bondia.com

## Social / Website

Juan Luis Pinto

Pilar Flores

## Columnists

Anthony Croes

Joris Zantvoort

Thais Franken

Weststraat 22  
T: 582-7800  
E: news@arubatoday.com  
W: www.arubatoday.com  
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# Fox News meteorologist Dean turns into fierce Cuomo critic



This image provided by Fox News Corp on March 5, 2021, shows Fox weather forecaster Janice Dean, who's become one of New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's fiercest critics after both of her in-laws died of the coronavirus last spring in elderly care facilities.

Associated Press

**By DAVID BAUDER and MARINA VILLENEUVE**  
**Associated Press Writers**  
**NEW YORK (AP)** — To Fox News Channel's Janice Dean, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo is a liar and a criminal. He blames others for his "disastrous decisions." He needs to resign — no, that's not enough. "He needs to go to jail!" she thundered on "Fox & Friends." Dean isn't a political commentator — she's Fox's senior meteorologist. In the past year, though, a searing personal loss has transformed her into a fighter for families who believe that a Cuomo-backed policy encouraging the transfer of COVID-19 positive patients into nursing homes was a deadly error. "She really hates when people are being screwed with and ... always has fought for the little guy," said Meghan McCain of "The View," who once worked with Dean at Fox News. McCain knows politics, and suggests her friend may have a future there. Yet Dean's advocacy and raises ethical questions. She's also made some dubious public claims about the impact of Cuomo's nursing home order and an NBC News story. "She is certainly a passion-

ate and articulate spokesperson on this matter," said Jeffrey McCall, a media ethics professor at DePauw University. "But it is also clear that Janice is using her profile as a Fox News Channel personality to engage in advocacy." March and April 2020 were a nightmare time in New York, with the new coronavirus spreading wildly. The timing was particularly cruel for Michael and Dolores Newman the parents of Dean's husband, Sean. Brooklyn through and through, they were married three days before Valentine's Day 1961. Michael Newman, an 83-year-old former firefighter, was in a Brooklyn facility with dementia and other issues. Dolores was in assisted living on Long Island, and hoped her husband would join her when his health improved. But he died March 29, a few hours after Sean got a call saying he wasn't feeling well. Dolores, 79, died on April 13. Looking into the deaths, the family was flabbergasted to learn of the Cuomo administration's directive — five days before Michael Newman's death — that nursing homes could not deny admission to someone solely because they

had COVID-19. The policy was expanded to cover assisted living facilities six days before Dolores Newman died. New York was desperately worried about running out of hospital space then. Cuomo insisted that CDC guidelines were being followed, and that it was wrong to discriminate against people because they had COVID. By May, the order was rescinded. Stories have since emerged about the lengths to which Cuomo's administration went to conceal the number of virus deaths among nursing home residents. Putting potentially contagious patients near some of society's oldest and most vulnerable populations made no sense to Dean. She didn't talk about it publicly at first. That changed last May when CNN host Chris Cuomo brandished a giant cotton swab to joke about the big nose of his brother, the governor. "It was so tone deaf," she said. "It was disgusting." She shared her anger in a text exchange with her friend Tucker Carlson and, at his invitation, went on his show the next night to tell her story. She hasn't stopped. Last month she wrote a story for Fox News' web-

site titled, "Cuomo's COVID nursing home policies robbed my in-laws of their 60th wedding anniversary." Dean, who is the weather forecaster on "Fox & Friends" and has been with the network since 2004, said her bosses have been fully supportive. "Obviously, it's a position that is probably a little uncomfortable for them because I'm the meteorologist and all of a sudden I'm into this role of being an advocate," she said. "But at the end of the day, my family was affected. And I feel like that is an important role to play if there are not people that have a voice in this." For Fox's audience dominated by conservatives tired of hearing criticism of then-President Donald Trump's pandemic response, here was an issue that raised serious questions about a politician lionized by many liberals. No one knows for sure how Dean's in-laws caught the virus, and facilities refused to discuss the Newmans. Dean has explicitly connected her in-law's deaths to Cuomo's nursing home directive. But that's unlikely, given the disease's usual incubation period and when they died. New research says nursing home residents are most at risk from out-

breaks that staff or visitors bring inside. Dean's disgust with Cuomo remains while a sexual harassment scandal swirls around the governor. Last month during one of his news conferences, she kept a running commentary on Twitter, calling him a "disgrace," a liar and "a criminal." Fox wouldn't make an executive available to talk about Dean. A spokeswoman notes that Dean is not a news reporter, and is talking about an issue that deeply affected her family. On Jan. 30, Dean attacked NBC News on Twitter, saying they had "censored" a friend interviewed on the topic by making her say that New York had failed nursing home families, instead of Cuomo. But a tape of reporter Kristen Dahlgren's interview disproves that notion, and the finished story is critical of Cuomo. Dean said the tape was doctored, but offered no evidence to back that up. While Dean waves off thoughts of a political future, others don't. "The best people who go into politics come at it organically, like people that weren't running for office their entire life," McCain said. Dean "has this way of speaking for just average Americans that I find really compelling. I am one of the people behind the scenes that's been encouraging her to run for office." □

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# Larson to highlight charitable causes in return to iRacing

By JENNA FRYER

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) —

Think of iRacing and Kyle Larson and the first thing that comes to mind is his use of a racial slur while participating in a late-night session nearly a year ago.

Of course it is, and Larson knows that. He can't escape that he said the N-word, he can only continue to move forward in his bid for redemption and the work he's done to repair the damage.

Larson will make his return to the popular online racing platform Wednesday night when NASCAR launches the 10-race eNASCAR iRacing Pro Invitational Series. The car he'll use will be "sponsored" by the Kyle Larson Foundation and feature three organizations he's designated for support.

Larson's "Drive for 5 Campaign" was launched this month to benefit children, families and communities in need of support. His mission is to fund five scholarships a year at the Urban Youth Racing School in Philadelphia, to provide daily meals for five families per day through The Sanneh Foundation, and support at least five communities per year through the school grants provided by Hendrick Cares.

All three organizations will be featured on Larson's No. 5 Chevrolet in the iRacing Series and Larson funds the "Drive for 5 Campaign" through his on-track performance. He's pledged \$5 for every lap completed this season and \$5,000 for each top-five finish. Through the first six races of the NASCAR season, Larson has committed \$22,205 via three top-fives and 1,441 laps.

"I'm hoping to raise \$500,000," Larson told The Associated Press. "I've got a long ways to go but I'm glad that I've gotten it started and that I'm able to showcase the organizations I've joined to help make a difference."

The three organizations earmarked by Larson's foundation aren't random. All three played an integral role in the work he did on



Kyle Larson celebrates after winning a NASCAR Cup Series auto race in Las Vegas, in this Sunday, March 7, 2021, file photo.

Associated Press

educating and improving himself during a NASCAR suspension that lasted all but the first four races of the 2020 season.

"I wanted to start a foundation for some time, I just didn't really ever know exactly what I wanted it to be about," he said. "I wanted it to be around kids, but I just needed something that was really close to me and personal to me, especially the things I went through last year."

One of the first people Larson reached out to after he'd been suspended was retired soccer star Tony Sanneh, whose foundation works on youth development and empowerment in the Minneapolis area. Larson went to visit Sanneh and volunteered at the foundation in the weeks before the city — and the nation — were rocked by the death of George Floyd in police custody in May.

Sanneh put Larson to work sorting dozens of pallets of food and distributing them to 400 cars a day. When Larson returned to Minneapolis after Floyd's death, Sanneh took him to the site where Floyd died and they

toured parts of the city heavily damaged in protests over racial injustice.

A friendship began and on "Giving Tuesday" last December, Larson launched a drive to raise \$50,000 for Sanneh's Holiday Giving program. Many of Larson's friends in the racing community contributed and helped push Sanneh to \$186,635 — well past the foundation's initial \$150,000 goal.

Sanneh told AP he's seen growth in Larson since the two first connected last spring.

"I think he's been trying to get back to normalcy but I think he's also changed the way he's approached life," Sanneh said. "This isn't like a big smokescreen or sham. He's interested in continual growth and getting back to being himself. This has been hard on him and people

assume when you make a mistake, with cancel culture, well it doesn't define who we are. Our life's work does, so I'm glad he's continued to do the work.

"Some people do a few things and then say, 'OK, that's behind me and I just want to concentrate on racing because that's what I love.' But he wants to do it all."

After his suspension, Larson also resumed work he'd done earlier in his career with the Urban Youth Racing School, a nonprofit that helps minorities advance in motorsports. And Hendrick Cares is a charitable arm of Rick Hendrick's empire.

It was Hendrick who reached out to Larson following his firing last April to offer emotional support. As Larson worked through NASCAR's reinstatement program, he found a sec-

ond chance with Hendrick at the race team driving the No. 5 Chevrolet. Hendrick believes so strongly in Larson that he's funding the car out of pocket convinced sponsors will see who Larson really is and eventually partner with one of NASCAR's most talented drivers.

That hedge is slowly starting to come together and Freightliner, a Hendrick partner since 2004, will become a primary sponsor for the first time in its relationship with the team when it is featured on Larson's car this weekend at Bristol Motor Speedway. Freightliner is the first non-Hendrick company to sponsor Larson so far this season.

Larson has one win already this season and led a race-high 269 laps Sunday at Atlanta Motor Speedway, where he was headed to victory until a late pass cost him a second win. The race was five days after shootings at three Atlanta-area spas killed eight, including six women of Asian descent.

Larson is Japanese-American and his maternal grandparents were held in an internment camp during World War II. He told AP that prior to this educational journey of self-improvement, the Atlanta shootings might not have even crossed his radar.

"It now takes me to what I have witnessed and learned over the last year with African-Americans, and it's a pretty similar thing with Asians," he said. "It hits even closer to me because I am Asian-American and I think had I not gone through what I did last year and not seen things firsthand, maybe it wouldn't have meant as much to me now. It definitely does and I hope there is change that will come." □





# March was bound to be mad; NCAA tourney hasn't disappointed

By **JIM LITKE**  
AP Sports Writer

Considering how everything else has gone this past year, March was bound to be mad. So far, it hasn't disappointed.

The last perfect NCAA Tournament bracket was busted before the first round was over. The second round just wrapped with an even dozen upsets already in the books — a record for the opening 48 games and just one shy of the mark for the entire tournament — with all kinds of possibilities still out there.

"You gotta bring that fire," said Gonzaga big man Drew Timme, whose team is the tournament's overall top seed. "Because all it takes is one good game and you can be out."

Oklahoma, in fact, played a very good game against Timme's Bulldogs and still got crushed, 87-71. So did No. 10 Maryland, bounced by No. 2 Alabama 96-77, and fifth-seeded Colorado, sent packing 71-53 by No. 4 Florida State.

Ditto for the five other teams that lost Monday — by the lopsided average of 18 points.

Sixth-seeded USC beat No.



**Michigan head coach Juwan Howard celebrates as he walks off the court after a second-round game against LSU in the NCAA men's college basketball tournament at Lucas Oil Stadium Monday, March 22, 2021, in Indianapolis. Michigan won 86-78.**

3 Kansas by 34, but failed to meet the NCAA definition of an upset: "defined as a win by a team seeded five spots lower than their opponent." No. 7 Oregon's win over second-seeded Iowa qualified, even though it was by "only" 15. No. 1 seed Michigan finally wriggled free of LSU, 86-78, in the day's only really close

game. Seedings can seem off in any year, but never moreso than in this one. The pandemic wreaked havoc on nearly every team, but hit some harder than others, and at different times. Kansas, for example, had one star, David McCormack, who cleared the COVID-19 protocol just hours before its first-round

game, and another, Jalen Wilson, just a day before he came off the bench against USC. Widely considered the toughest league this past season, the Big Ten Conference got nine invites and is down to Michigan. West Coast teams, often overlooked and rarely overrated, may have finally benefitted from being un-

derrated this time around. Unbeaten Gonzaga was a lock to be the tourney's top seed, but the rest of the Left Coast contingent that made it to the Sweet 16 — USC (a No. 6), Oregon (7), UCLA (11) and Oregon State (12), all Pac-12 Conference members — were supposed to be in disarray. Suddenly, though, they look like ringers descending on the local country club for those annual member-guest handicap golf tournaments. Oregon gambled by playing up-tempo out of the gate and focusing its defense on every Hawkeye but Luka Garza, everybody's player of the year. Garza wound up with 36 points in the final game of a storied college career, but it was clear by halftime even he couldn't beat the Ducks by himself.

"It hit me all at once that this is the last time I'll put on this jersey," Garza said, fighting back tears. "I feel bad I wasn't able to lead this team where it needs to go. ... It's something that's going to haunt me forever." For all the chaos unleashed in the first two rounds, Gonzaga still looks like the class of the field. □

Associated Press

## Problem gambling foes warn on sports betting college deals



**Colorado guard McKinley Wright IV, left, and teammate Colorado forward Jeriah Horne (41) commiserate after their 71-53 loss to Florida State after a second-round game in the NCAA college basketball tournament at Farmers Coliseum in Indianapolis, Monday, March 22, 2021.**

Associated Press

By **WAYNE PARRY**  
Associated Press

**ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (AP)** — A national group that fights compulsive gambling is concerned about financial deals between

colleges and sports betting companies.

The National Council on Problem Gambling on Tuesday issued a set of recommendations for such deals that aim to reduce

the danger of students developing a gambling problem.

They include not compensating the schools based on the number of people the colleges refer to sign up for sports betting.

And they call on schools to provide problem gambling education, and for sports betting companies to fund those efforts.

Sports betting companies including PointsBet and William Hill have reached affiliation deals with colleges including the University of Colorado, and the University of Nevada's Las Vegas and Reno campuses.

Keith Whyte, the council's executive director, said in a statement that the guidelines "can help limit the number of young adults who could develop

signs of gambling addiction as a result of sports betting, which is expanding rapidly across America."

"We hope gambling operators, institutions of higher learning and state officials each feel a sense of urgency in adopting these responsible gambling policies and problem gambling treatment measures, whether sports betting is legal or might be in the near future," he said.

Last September, PointsBet and the University of Colorado inked a \$1.6 million five-year deal in which the school will receive funding while promoting the sports book on its media channels and at in-person sporting events.

The deal also calls for Colorado to receive \$30 for each person that signs up

for sports betting after being referred by the school. The university will also help recruit students and alumni for internships and jobs at PointsBet.

PointsBet, as well as top athletics department officials with the university, did not respond to messages seeking comment Tuesday.

In a news release when the deal was announced, Colorado said the partnership "provides a financial boost for CU Athletics during a time when athletic department budgets nationwide are stressed by the COVID-19 pandemic."

The gambling council said college students, and particularly student-athletes, are at greater risk of developing a gambling problem than the general population. □